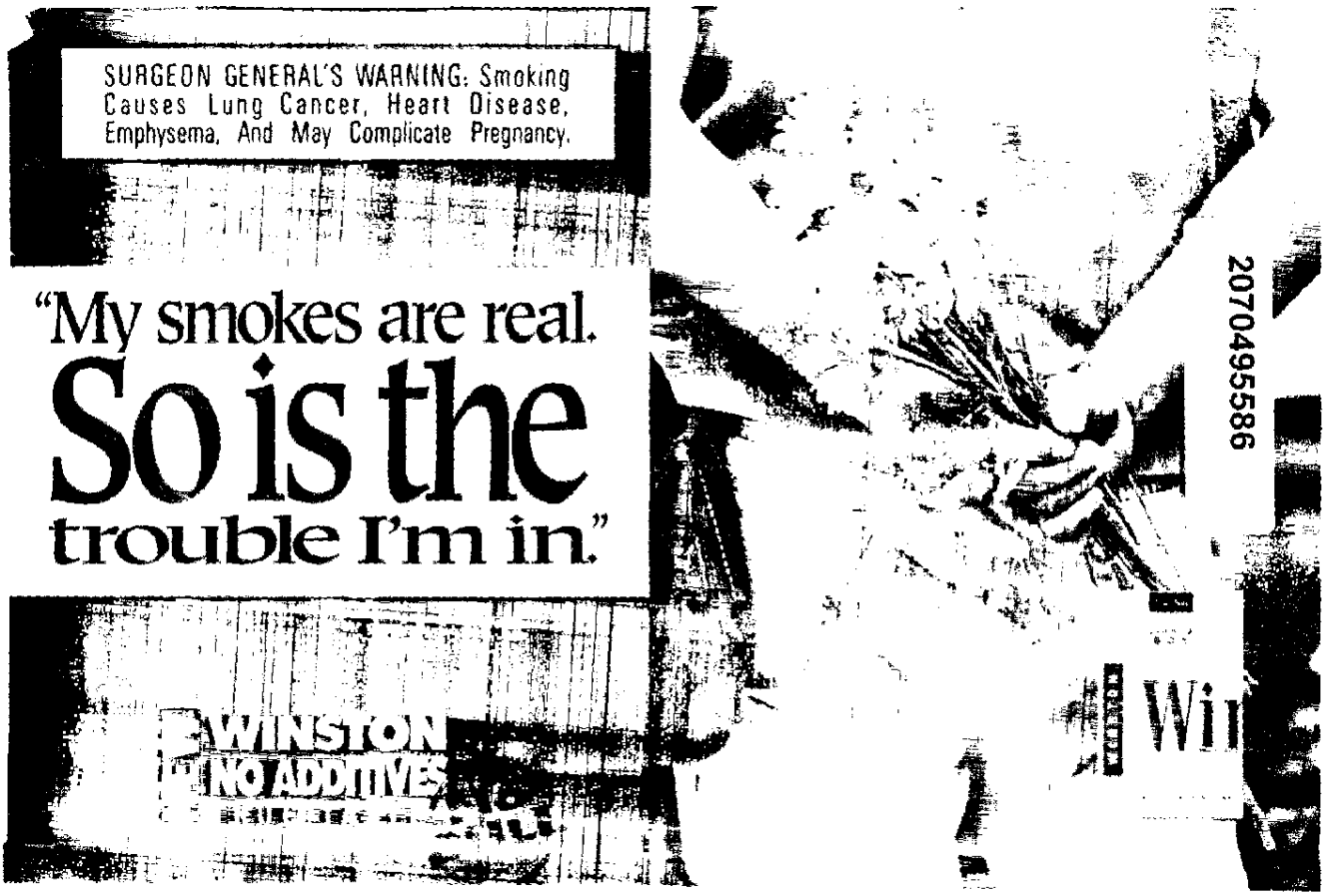

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Take It on Faith

One thing television does very well is provide different variations on the same theme. If you don't like *NYPD Blue*, a reality-based cop show set in New York, you can watch *Homicide*, a reality-based cop show set in Baltimore. If *ER*'s cast of angst-ridden physicians doesn't do it for you, try the head cases on *Chicago Hope*.

A similar thing has happened this year with shows about clerics. *Nothing Sacred* is a series about a hip thirtysomething priest. The first time I saw it, it was about sex. *Good News* is a series about a hip twentysomething pastor. The first time I saw it, it was about sex. *Soul Man* is a series about a hip fortysomething minister. The first time I saw it, it was about sex. The only clerical series that isn't about a hip man of the cloth and sex is *7th Heaven*, a show where absolutely nobody is hip. I'm talking *nobody*.

Despite some surface similarities, I based on the assumption that nothing could be funnier than having an aging member of the Blues Brothers play a former biker who has donned a collar. Personally, I can think of funnier things.

One of those things is *Good News*, my favorite new sitcom. True, the first show I saw, in which a bunch of condoms turned up in the salad on the dinner table, was tasteless. But this show can be funny. In one episode, rival gangs gather at a church social and are ready to rumble until the entertainment arrives: an African-American square dancing band that persuades the gang members to do-si-do with one another. Watching the boyz in the 'hood sashay with the hicks from the stix is one of the cleverest bits of comedy I've seen in years.

The dramatic entries in the clerical lineup are *7th Heaven* and the controversial *Nothing Sacred*. The former is a *Waltons*-type program during which problems tend to get solved with a big hug. *Nothing Sacred* takes a different tack. With its moral ambiguity about such issues as abortion, it isn't hard to see why traditional Catholics would be upset about this show. But it's interesting, nonetheless. When Kevin Anderson demands to know why poor people are huddling in freezing soup kitchens when the Dow is topping 8000, he's asking a question that lots of Catholic priests ask themselves every day.

If *Nothing Sacred* were the only show about clerics on today, the public could complain that TV is giving a skewed view of religious life. But television has provided a choice: two somewhat risqué comedies, a Little Church on the Prairie, and a thoughtful drama. If you don't like *Nothing Sacred*, don't watch it. I'm sure others will—although probably not Catholic League members.

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